

“19”

By: Zach Miller

As I walk out of the locker room, I look across the field,  
Fans roar and the speakers boom, waiting for us to take the pitch.  
Two numbers are printed on my shirt, a solid gold 19,  
No ones pays much attention, it's just a meaningless number.  
What could it ever mean? Numbers don't have meaning.  
But that's where they're wrong, see some numbers do have meaning.  
These numbers. Gleaming.  
I'm Zach Miller and this is what my numbers mean to me.

As a kid I loved to run around my yard playing games.

Tag, capture the flag, mostly sports.

I would narrate myself as I made the game winning catch

Dreaming of being enshrined in gilded halls of fame

And one sport I loved more than any other was the beautiful game of soccer.

My Dad played it. My uncle played it. So I played it too.

It was only rec, but man was it fun,

We would swarm the ball like a hive of bees,

And then afterwards we got snacks,

That were enjoyed while wiping the mud off our knees

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But then the snacks weren't as filling,

And the sun didn't shine as bright,

And the grass didn't feel so green,

A step up in play, that what I need!

I'll try out for the travel team.

This is the real start to my journey.

I arrive, and numbers are pinned on us like livestock.

Gossip crawls along as we ponder what team we will make.

Before I can think too much, a coach breaks the silence and takes us away

A gauntlet of drills consumes my next 2 days

Run, dribble, shoot, defend, water, run again, now sprint, juggle, Pause.

It's time to pick teams.

Names are called. One by one. Until there is silence. I didn't make it.

What could this mean?

I go back to my old fields, the soccer I used to love in rec.

It was always so fun! Even if we weren't the best.

But the life was drained from the grass, the shiny goals, now they felt rusty

Every shot, Every pass, compared to those travel kids, it all just felt dusty

But I realized that another year will come, and hope is all I needed.

So another opportunity rolls around, another chance, one final dance

All of the kids who made it are dressed the same and are easy to pick out,

Same routine and same drills, now it's MY time to shine, and after it allllllll

I was cut without even a second thought. All of that work. For nothing.

This happens the next year, and the next year, and the next year.

I spend hours practicing on my own and this is what I get?

Hours in the summer sun were wasted but they didn't owe me anything for it

I had lost hope for that team, it just wasn't meant to be.

But a new team was coming, the Carmel High school team.

This summer, I would dedicate myself. 4 practices a week,

Conditioning, games, practice on my own, there never could be enough

This next tryout was a different beast from the rest.

Over 100 kids. 12 hours of work over 3 days.

Playing against a group of Carmel's best

I had no chance, no way.

Somehow this one was the most painful thought

, I should be callous to it but, well now,

Seeing the players at school, in all of their gear, I was filled with envy.

There's no hiding it. But my career was done, it was time to hang the towel.

The next part of my journey starts right here, every hero has to hit rock bottom,

My best friend CJ gives me a call, and he tells me I have a chance to play after all.

At Westfield Soccer Club, where there were spots with nobody on them,

I had hope again, and hope was all I needed.

After finally making it, it felt surreal, am I supposed to be here?

I mean I'd never made it before, what am I doing on the field?

But I didn't have much time to ask these questions,

Because I was about to train more in 6 months than I ever had before.

Another season, but now with tournaments, now with Nike jackets, and now with pride

Run, pass, dribble, shoot, sprint, slide,

it was like tryouts 24/7

It ended as quickly as it began and I was back to the summer,

Looking up at the Carmel tryouts looming over me.

This summer would be different, I believed in myself now.

This summer would change EVERYTHING.

And that summer. After pouring myself out onto the field,

I was told that I had finally made a team. Carmel JV soccer.

Nothing could ruin that moment.

I had always carried this chip on my shoulder

And I knew that I would probably fail again,

But that season was the first time I had finally tasted the fruits of my labor

I got cut from a better club team the next year,

They could only roster 18 players. I was number 19.

I fought them as hard as I could and got on as a practice only player.

But injuries swallowed up some of our talent and soon I was playing club again.

After that season I went from bench warmer to starter,  
And the next 2 summers I worked even harder,  
Making the Carmel JV and Varsity teams each year,  
As well as both club teams with no fear, of being cut.

That final cut before gave a way to describe to my journey,  
Simply nineteen, that's what it meant to me.

When people say that it took blood, sweat, and tears,  
I used to not really know if I believed them.  
But after my journey, I realized that anything less means failure.

It taught me more than how to play a game,  
It taught me how to overcome.

And everyone has their own number, or at least something, that defines them.  
So what I want to know is what do your numbers mean to you.